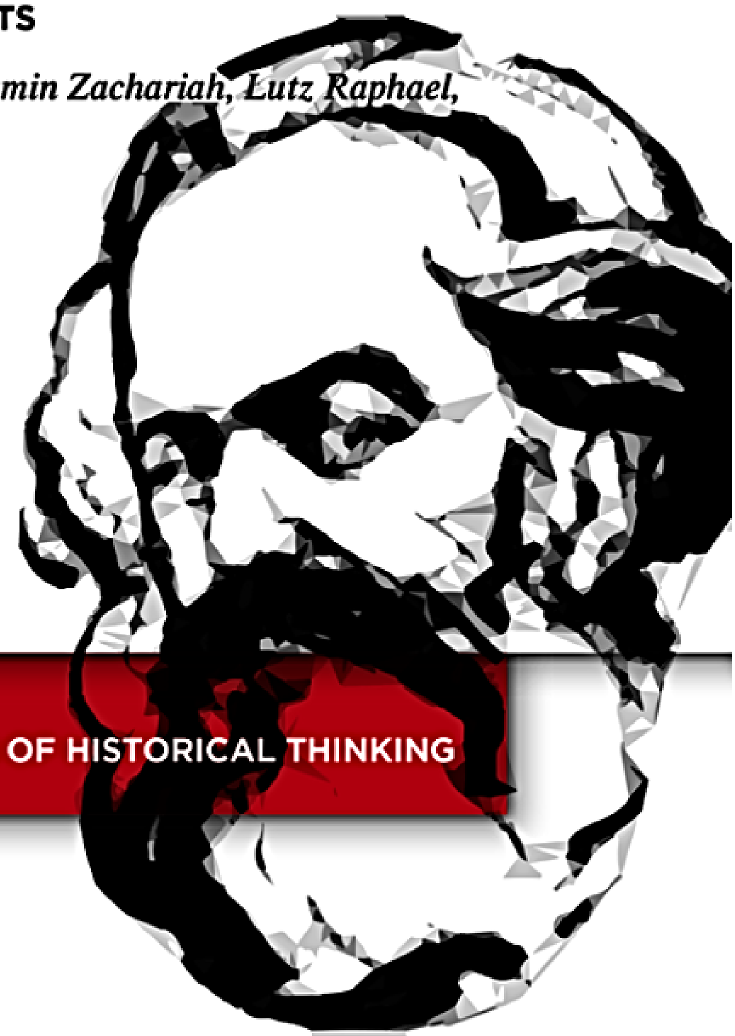
DE GRUYTER
OLDENBOURG

WHAT'S LEFT OF MARXISM

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF THINKING WITH MARXIAN THEMES AND CONCEPTS

Edited by Benjamin Zachariah, Lutz Raphael, Brigitta Bernet



THE POLITICS OF HISTORICAL THINKING

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Volume 2

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Mohammed Maraqten

Marxist Historiography and the Ancient Near East

The Impact of Marxist Writings on the Historical Interpretation of the Ancient Near East in Retrospect

The ideas which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels formed, and their abundant works can be understood in several ways. As a result, they have presented the groundwork for different schools of thought to understand the world-historical process.[1] Marx carried out wide-ranging historical inquiries, examining a substantial part of what was considered as 'world history' in his time.[2] Although many studies have been written concerning Marx and classical antiquity,[3] little has been written about Marx and the Ancient Near East.[4]

The contributions of Marxist scholars to the study of the Ancient Near East are very significant, especially those studies written between 1960 and end of the 1980s. These studies concentrated on socio-economic analyses, origins and formations of the state and the social structure of society and cities.

After 1990s and the collapse of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, the Marxist historians lost the institutional bases of their studies. This collapse seriously reduced the credibility of Marxism as a general theory of history and society among scholars. In the light of these developments, the 1990s saw a retreat from Marxist interpretations of history, and this had an impact on the reassessment of the history of the Ancient Near East by both Marxist and non-Marxist scholars. Parallel to these changes the field of Ancient Near Eastern studies has progressed and the international scholarship in this discipline has achieved brilliant results.[5]

1 See Eric Hobsbawm, "Marx and History," *Diagnoses* 32, no. 125 (1984): 103 – 114.
2 Michael R. Krätke, "Marx and World History," *International Review of Social History* 63, no. 1 (2018): 91– 125 see also the article of Matthias Middell in this volume.
3 See for instance Richard I. Frank, "Marxism and ancient history," *Arethusa* 8, no. 1 (1975): 43 – 58 and Konstantinos Vlassopoulos, "Marxism and Ancient History," in *How to Do Things with History: New Approaches to Ancient Greece*, eds. Danielle Allen, Paul Christesen and Paul Millett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 209 – 235.
4 Andrej Kreutz, "Marx and the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1983), 155 – 171; Frank, "Marxism and ancient history," 50 – 51.
5 Daniel C. Snell, *A Companion to the Ancient Near East* (Oxford, Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005); Eckart Frahm, *A Companion to Assyria* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017); Gwendolyn Leick, *The Babylonian World* (London: Routledge, 2007).

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In the light of these developments, the 1990s saw a retreat from Marxist interpretations of history, and this had an impact on the reassessment of the history of the Ancient Near East by both Marxist and non-Marxist scholars.

In this chapter, an outline of the significance of the Marxist studies on the Ancient Near East will be presented along with a discussion of those Marxist ideas that are still regarded as valid by the international community of Ancient Near East specialists and a consideration of the extent to which these Marxist studies have inspired the scholarly community.

Karl Marx and the Impact of the Marxist Writings on the Historical Interpretation of the Ancient Near East

Specific attention should be paid to the fact that in 1883 when Karl Marx died, the cuneiform writing system had only recently been deciphered and only the Akkadian language was slightly known. Historical knowledge of the Ancient Near East was at that time very limited since the cuneiform sources were not available and hitherto only a very small number of socio-economic documents in Sumerian and Akkadian were published. In fact, at this time most of the historical accounts of the Ancient Near East were based primarily on the Classical authors and the Biblical accounts.[6]

Thus, it is clear that Marx and Engels had only very limited knowledge of the Ancient Near Eastern civilisations,[7] and Marx was aware of the historical knowledge of his time.[8] However, their major concepts on economy and society in antiquity have been enormously significant for the later scholarship of Mesopotamia, and these concepts continue to function as a convenient framework of orientation.[9]

Marxist thought has influenced not only the archaeological theories of the historical periods but also those of the prehistoric and protohistoric eras. Marx

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6 Marc Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), 100 – 113.

7 On the writings of Marx and Engels on the ancient Near East see Burchard Brentjes, "Marx und Engels in ihrem Verhältnis zu Asien," in *Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels zur Geschichte des Orients*, ed. Burchard Brentjes (Halle: Martin-Luther-Universität, 1983), 3 – 30.

8 Krätke, 'Marx and World History', 91 – 125.

9 On the pre-Capitalists Formations by Marx see Eric Hobsbawm, *How to Change the World: Reflections on Marx and Marxism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 127 – 175.

carried out the study of the origins and dynamics of capitalist society and the societies of the pre-capitalist period. He used his materialist framework and his treatment of ancient societies was, however, sketchy at best for this phase. Nonetheless, he revealed the features of social change in the historical and pre-historical periods.[10] The basic orientation of Marxist scholars for the study of the formation of the state in the Ancient Near East has been provided by Engels' study entitled *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats*.[11] He relied on the notion of the primitive Mode of Production in the book, *Ancient Society*[12] by the American anthropologist L.H. Morgan. In this book Morgan illustrated a pre-class social structure of society where the measures of production were possessed by the community and integrated important evidence about the emergence of class society.[13]

The key influence of Marx in historical studies on the Ancient Near East was in the area of theory. As is well known, his historical materialism is based on a specific concept of society and social change. He was mainly concerned with the ways in which contradictions between forces and relations of production happen and lead dialectically to transformations of society.[14]

Substantial Marxist studies on the Ancient Near East started with the Soviet Marxist historiography on Antiquity. By the 1920s, Soviet scholars started using Marxist historical ideas in archaeology and in the interpretation of Ancient Near Eastern history.[15] They applied what has been defined as orthodox Marxist theo-

10 Karl Marx, *Formen, die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen* (Berlin: Dietz, 1952); See also Ph.L. Kohl, and C. Fawcett, "Archaeology in the service of the state: theoretical considerations," in *Nationalism, politics, and the practice of archaeology*, eds. Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 3–18.

11 See also Friedrich Engels, "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, [1884], 1978), 734–759.

12 Morgan, L. H., *Ancient Society; or, Researches in the Line of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & company, 1877).

13 Friedrich Engels, *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats: Im Anschluss an Lewis H. Morgan's Forschungen* (Hottingen-Zürich: Verlag Schweizerische Volksbuchhandlung, 1884).

14 Jerzy Topolski, *Methodology of History* (Warszawa: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1976), 197–216; Igor M. Diakonoff, ed., *Early Antiquity I*, trans. Alexander Kirjanov (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), 4–13.

15 On archaeology in general see Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006). and Norman Yoffee and Andrew Sherratt, *Archaeological theory: who sets the agenda?* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997). On Marxist archaeology see the discussion in Thomas C. Patterson, *Marx's Ghost: Conversations with Archaeologists* (Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers, 2003), 1–32 and Randall H. McGuire, *A Marxist Archaeology* (Orlando: Academic Press, 2002), 9–17.

ry by the Bolshevik Party and adopted a well-defined framework of key notions to Ancient Near Eastern history and archaeology: (1) Dialectical and Materialist Standpoint, (2) Distinct Phases of Human Society, (3) Infrastructure (Forces of Production, Relations of Production), (4) Superstructure.

Soviet scholars and later their colleagues in the socialist countries studied the economic structures and the contradictions inside these societies.[16] The continuity of the historical process was an important aspect of their approach but at the same time Marx's idea of class struggles as the prime movers of change was a central element in their studies on the contradictions and causes of change in society and history.[17]

The Soviet orientalist Vasiliy V. Struve (1889–1965) made pioneering efforts.[18] The studies of Struve on the Ancient Near East were fundamental not only for Soviet scholars, but for Marxist historians in general.[19] A specific conventional form appears in which governments such as those of the Soviet Union and GDR (German Democratic Republic) managed historical and archaeological writing according to Marxist dogmas.[20] The governmental statement on the use of Marxist-inspired methodology and theory, that is, historical materialism and dialectical materialism, as the only method to analyse historic events is accurately seen as a detrimental approach.[21] In East Germany, the government arranged for the chapter on the Ancient Near East in school textbooks to be written by specialists in the field.[22]

Independent from Soviet scholarship, the Australian archaeologist V. Gordon Childe (1892–1957) also played a pioneering role in establishing Marxist archae-

16 On the rise of the historical materialism see Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 176–181.

17 Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 208–213.

18 Diakonoff, *Early Antiquity*, 7.

19 The standard work for Marxist's Soviets historians is Marschall Shukow, ed., *Weltgeschichte in 10 Bänden* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1961–1968). The contribution on the ancient Near East is written by V. V. Struve.

20 Elke Gringmuth-Dallmer, "Between Science and Ideology: Aspects of Archaeological Research in the Former GDR Between the End of World War II and the Reunification," in *Archaeology of the Communist Era: A Political History of Archaeology of the 20th Century*, ed. Ludomir R. Lozny (New York: Springer, 2017) 235–273; on the Marxist methodology of ancient history in the GDR see for instance Isolde Stark, *Elisabeth Charlotte Welskopf und die Alte Geschichte in der DDR: Beiträge der Konferenz vom 21. bis 23. November 2002 in Halle/Saale* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005).

21 On the rise of the historical materialism see Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 176–181 and McGuire, *A Marxist Archaeology*, 9–17, on critical approach see Gringmuth-Dallmer, Between Science and Ideology, 235–273.

22 Hans Neumann, "Der Alte Orient in der Schule: Erfahrungen (und Perspektiven?) beim Verfassen von Geschichtslehrbüchern," *Altorientalische Forschungen* 43, no. 1–2 (2016): 170–188.

ology.[23] Childe emphasised cultural evolution and expressed his criticism of the methodology of Soviet archaeology and did not agree with the whole agenda of Soviet archaeology. He refused its comprehensive scheme of socio-economic formations and any other unilinear expression of social evolution.[24] His publications stand out from those of his contemporary archaeologists. He developed an outstanding vision and found the best satisfactory framework for the explanation of his theory of prehistoric and historic past in Marxism and was able to analyse archaeological artefacts using Marxist thought.

He interpreted the transition from hunter-gathering to settled agriculture and pastoralism as the first great social revolution, and called it the *Neolithic Revolution*, also known as the Agricultural Revolution or the First Agricultural Revolution. Childe presented the results of his reflections in 1936 in his book *Man Makes Himself*. The concept of a Neolithic Revolution is still used by the international scholarly community.[25]

His idea started with the question of why Man had decided to settle in dwellings. What had inspired him to do this? Was he compelled by external powers or was it a spontaneous initiative that became particularly beneficial? Hunting–gathering must have become unsatisfactory at some point and Man had to look for a better situation. This better condition was found in sedentary farming, which was associated with the domestication of animals and plants. Childe assumed that the origins of sedentarisation should be sought in the area of the Near East. According to him, agriculture requests water. Once it goes further than the most basic production on a sustenance level, it requires irrigation techniques, digging, constructions of dams and water distribution channels on a large-scale.[26] These are social duties. This account goes right to the heart of historical materialism.[27]

Further, in his later book *What Happened in History*, Childe tried to develop a more obviously Marxist style to express accounts of cultural change that were centred not on technological knowledge as a prime mover but on social, politi-

23 See for instance Vere G. Childe, *What Happened in History* (rev. ed.) (London: Penguin Books, 1954); Patterson, Marx’s Ghost, 33–62.
24 Vere G. Childe, *Man Makes Himself* (New York: Mentor Books, 1958).
25 See for instance Alan H. Simmons, *The Neolithic Revolution in the Near East: Transforming the Human Landscape* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 11–13.
26 Vere G. Childe, *Social Evolution* (London: Watts, 1951).
27 On the rise of historical materialism see Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 176–181.

cal, and economic institutions and the role they played in bringing about change.[28]

The Marxist historians of the Ancient Near East were led by Igor M. Diakonoff (1915 – 1999)[29] and the other members of the Soviet school of the socio-economic history of the Ancient Near East such as Muhammad A. Dandamayev (1928 – 2017).[30] These scholars made very important contributions to the study of the Ancient Near East. The international scholarship of the Ancient Near East had to take into account these Marxist works from the mid-1960s and onward, and not only the Soviet studies but also the studies of other non-Soviet Marxist historians such as the East German studies on the Ancient Near East.[31] Among the East German scholars are Horst Klengel[32] and Joachim Oelsner.[33] Joachim Herrmann was one of the most prominent archaeologists in East Germany.[34] Marxism's impact on archaeology was especially pronounced in the periodisation of history.[35] Of great significance are the studies of the East German scholar Holger Preißler on the socio-economic structures in ancient Yemen, in which he gave several specific examples on the free and unfree status

28 Gordon Childe accomplished the difficult task of developing a more thoughtful and less dogmatic consideration of Marxism as a methodical apparatus and was able to apply it to the analysis of archaeological data, see Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 344.

29 Igor M. Diakonoff, ed., *Ancient Mesopotamia, Socio-economic History: a Collection of Studies by Soviet Scholars* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969); Igor M. Diakonoff, *The Paths of History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

30 Muhammad A. Dandamayev, *Slavery in Babylonia: From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, rev. edition, 1984).

31 Hans Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR (1986 – 1990) und ihre inhaltlich-strukturelle Umgestaltung in den neuen Bundesländern (1990/91 – 1995)," in *Wissenschaft und Wiedervereinigung. Asien – und Afrikawissenschaften im Umbruch: Studien und Materialien der Interdisziplinären Arbeitsgruppe Wissenschaften und Wiedervereinigung der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, eds. Wolfgang-Hagen Krauth and Ralf Wolz (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), 165 – 268, 209 – 212.

32 Horst Klengel, ed., *Kulturgeschichte des alten Vorderasien* (Berlin: Veröffentlichungen des Zentralinstituts für Alte Geschichte und Archäologie der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR 18, 1989).

33 Joachim Oelsner, *Materialien zur babylonischen Gesellschaft und Kultur in hellenistischer Zeit* (Budapest: Eötvös University, 1986).

34 In 1969 J. Herrmann (1932 – 2010) was employed as a head of the newly created Central Institute for Ancient History and Archaeology of the GDR Academy of Sciences. Most of his research contributions related to Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Lenin and their theories, as is frequently the case with other GDR archaeologists. Herrmann was a productive publisher and author, see Gringmuth-Dallmer, *Between Science and Ideology*, 235 – 273.

35 Irmgard Sellnow, *Grundprinzipien einer Periodisierung der Urgeschichte: Ein Beitrag auf Grundlage ethnographischen Materials* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961).

of individuals and groups in the Sabaean kingdom.[36] In addition, several Russian Marxist scholars contributed to the studies of ancient South Arabian civilisations. Among them were N. Pigulevskaja, A. G. Lundin and M. B. Piotrowski.[37]

In general, the forces, the means and the relations of production were a favourite topic among Marxist historians,[38] alongside the study of the social and economic life of the common man.[39] In the 1960s, the emphasis was on the origins of states or more complex political structures that were seen as the seeds of modern nation-states. The nationalistic flavour of such research is obvious in several countries of the Near East. Despite certain common patterns in the applied theory, methodology, and the organisation of archaeology, there are also certain regional peculiarities, hence the term 'Marxist-inspired ideologies'.[40]

Among Western scholars, Karl Wittfogel's work *Oriental Despotism* attracted a great deal of attention.[41] Actually, Karl Wittfogel (1886 – 1988) was more concerned with the totalitarian systems of his day than with ancient history. He tried to relate the evolution of absolute power in regions outside Europe to the organisation of hydraulic resources. The ex-Marxist Wittfogel employed Marx's original terms as a polemical reflection of the Soviet state, which he counted as a manifestation of totalitarianism similar to Asia's 'hydraulic civilisations'.[42] He presents a clear analysis of the central role of irrigation systems in Egypt,

36 Holger Preißler, "Abhängigkeitsverhältnisse in Südarabien in mittelsabäischer Zeit (1. Jh. v. u. Z. – 4. Jh. u. Z.)," *Ethnographisch-Archäologische Zeitschrift (EAZ)* 25, no. 1 (1984): 75 – 83; Holger Preißler, *Das kulturelle Niveau von Abhängigen in mittelsabäischen Inschriften, in Aktualisierte Beiträge zum 1. Internationalen Symposium Südarabien interdisziplinär an der Universität Graz mit kurzen Einführungen zu Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte. in Memoriam Maria Höfner*, ed. Roswitha G. Stiegner (Graz: Verlag Leykam, 1997), 133 – 142.

37 Walter W. Müller, *Südarabien im Altertum: Kommentierte Bibliographie der Jahre 1997 bis 2011* (Tübingen, Berlin: Wasmuth Verlag, 2014), 180 – 185, 235.

38 Diakonoff, *Early Antiquity*, 57; Elisabeth Ch. Welskopf, *Die Produktionsverhältnisse im alten Orient und in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1957), 114 – 118, 158 – 177.

39 Joachim Herrmann and Irmgard Sellnow, eds., *Die Rolle der Volksmassen in der Geschichte der vorkapitalistischen Gesellschaftsformationen. Zum XIV. Internationalen Historiker-Kongreß in San Francisco 1975* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1975).

40 Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalnik, eds., *The Early State* (Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton, 1978); Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the archaic state: evolution of the earliest cities, states and Civilization* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005); Horst Klengel, "Einige Erwägungen zur Staats-Entstehung in Mesopotamien," in *Beiträge zur Entstehung des Staates*, eds. Joachim Herrmann and Irmgard Sellnow (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1973), 36 – 55.

41 Karl A. Wittfogel, *(1957): Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, London: YUP, reprint 1967).

42 Peter J. Perry, "Thirty years on: or, Whatever happened to Wittfogel?," *Political Geography Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (1988): 75 – 80.

Mesopotamia, India and China to explain the basic differences between the state-ruled societies of Asia and the pluralist societies in the West.[43]

Wittfogel presents in his hypothesis a well-defined investigation of the key role of irrigation systems to the rise of the state in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and China. In his view, the origin of the state stemmed from the requirement of building and managing large-scale irrigation systems. This hydraulic hypothesis of Wittfogel has gained attention in regard to ancient state formation.[44] However, it has since been proved that the formation of the earliest states in the world did not depend on large-scale irrigation systems.[45]

Marxist Studies on the Ancient Near East since the 1970s

The progress of our knowledge of the Ancient Near East is due to the discovery of thousands of written records since the middle of the twentieth century and other archaeological discoveries.[46] Essentially, there are some enormous contributions on these topics, not only by Marxist historians themselves but also by many other scholars, who were inspired by Marxism. Among these contributions are surveys of the history and culture of the Ancient Near East, studies on legal systems, social institutions, economic structures, ethnic relations and religions from the third to the end of the first millennium BCE.[47]

It should be emphasised that after World War II a new surge of Marxist studies in the field of ancient history and in particular on the Ancient Near East occurred. These Marxist studies on Antiquity flourished in the 1970s and continued until the end of the 1980s, especially in the GDR.[48] It must be emphasised that the Marxist studies on the Ancient Near East in this period constituted a challenge for Western scholarship in the field. As before, the great impact of the Marxist school of Ancient Near Eastern Studies was primarily in the field of eco-

43 Udo Witzens, "Kritik der Thesen Karl A. Wittfogels über den "hydraulischen Despotismus" mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des historischen singhalesischen Theravāda-Buddhismus" (Dissertation, Universität Heidelberg, 2000), 8–33.

44 Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism*.

45 David H. Price, "Wittfogel's Neglected Hydraulic/Hydroagricultural Distinction," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 50, no. 2 (1994): 187–204.

46 Snell, *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*; Frahm, *A Companion to Assyria*; Leick, *The Babylonian World*.

47 Snell, *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*; Leick, *The Babylonian World*.

48 Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 165–268.

nomics and socio-economic developments as well as on the origins of the state, etc.[49]

In general, it seems that at first Western scholars of the Ancient Near East did not concern themselves much with Marxist historical studies. However, by the mid-1970s, the debate on Marxist concepts by scholars in the field was no longer prohibited in Western countries, and Marxism started to enter the theories of prehistoric archaeology and historical studies in the United States as well as in Britain.[50] Marxist scholars of the ancient historical fields, especially in Italy and France, had started already in the 1960s to develop new approaches to the study of ancient history. Some of these historians identified themselves as Marxists, while others employed Marxist categories and drew on Marxist theory while refusing to be classified as Marxists.[51]

In the Communist Bloc, the Marxist and the Marxist-inspired approaches and theories were challenged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries. Marxist historiography and theory experienced a decline after these events since these studies were associated with the state institutions and academies that belonged to the political systems and ideologies of these countries.[52] However, in the Western countries, the Marxist historians and archaeologists as well as scholars who were inspired by Marxism elucidated the historical phenomena from the past without being put under political or administrative pressure and they continued their activities. It should be noted that in the Western countries, although the governments had limited control over the organisation and practice of archaeology and history, this research was often governed by religious and colonial assumptions and it is not correct to claim that such research in the West had no ideological background and

49 Vlassopoulos, "Marxism and Ancient History," 209–212; see also Joachim Herrmann and and Jens Köhn, *Familie, Staat und Gesellschaftsformation. Grundprobleme vorkapitalistischer Epochen einhundert Jahre nach Friedrich Engels' Werk Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1988).

50 McGuire, *A Marxist Archaeology*, 1–17; Vlassopoulos, Marxism and Ancient History, 209–212; Ludomir R. Lozny, "Sickle, Hammer, and Trowel: Theory and Practice of Archaeology Under Communism" in *Archaeology of the Communist Era: A Political History of Archaeology of the 20th Century*, ed. Ludomir R. Lozny (New York: Springer, 2017), 9–58.

51 Patterson, *Marx's Ghost*, 33–62.

52 Sergey Krikh, "Assyriology and Stalinism: Soviet Historiography and the Invention of Slavery in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern History* 3, no. 2 (2018): 191–209; Leo S. Klejn, "Archaeology in Soviet Russia," in *Archaeology of the Communist Era: A Political History of Archaeology of the 20th Century*, ed. Ludomir R. Lozny (New York: Springer, 2017), 59–99.

that only the goals of archaeology were somewhat different.[53] In many cases historiography in the West is governed by the ideologies of Orientalism[54] and Eurocentrism.[55] Even though Orientalism as a scientific perspective has shown various hints of interior crisis and indications of collapse, Orientalism has been preserved by extensive and organised institutional support. However, it should be distinguished between Orientalism as an ideological approach and Oriental studies and the great and important contributions of Western scholars on history and archaeology of the Middle East.

Since the 1990s, Marxist studies have slowly declined in current writings on the economic and social history of the ancient world. If one comes across the name of Marx or the term Marxism, it is mostly stated within the within the context of a polemical statement.[56] However, in recent years Marxist ideas have established new impetus and new approaches have been developed.[57] Some of the concepts were developed by two of the greatest Marxist scholars of the Ancient Near East, namely the Russian Igor M. Diakonoff and the Italian historian Mario Liverani.[58] Marxist theories of culture have generally emphasised that ideas and institutions depend on a society's basic relations of production. Marxist studies on these topics such as those of Dandamayev have had a guiding impact in the field.[59]

Many Marxists or former Marxist historians have changed their positions from purely materialist ones to more idealist ones and they have abandoned some of their orthodox Marxist ideas.[60] Although the theoretical approaches of the Marxist historians are still important in this discussion,[61] several classical notions of Marxist historical thought such as the six stages of development or

53 Mogens T. Larsen, "Orientalism and Near Eastern archaeology," in *Domination and Resistance*, eds. Daniel Miller, Michael Rowlands and Chris Tilley, (London: Routledge, 1989), 228–238; Bruce G. Trigger, "Alternative Archaeologies: Nationalist, Colonialist, Imperialist," *Man* (New Series) 19, no. 3 (1984): 355–370.

54 Said, *Orientalism*.

55 Mario Liverani, "Ancient near Eastern History from eurocentrism to an Open World," *ISIMU: Revista sobre Oriente Próximo y Egipto en la antigüedad* 2 (1999): 3–9.

56 Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 165–268.

57 Eric Hobsbawm, "Marxist Historiography Today," in *Marxist History- Writing for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Chris Wickham (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 180–187.

58 Diakonoff, *The Paths of History*; Mario Liverani, *The Ancient Near East: History, Society and Economy* (London, New York: Routledge, 2013).

59 Muhammad A. Dandamayev and Vladimir G. Lukonin, *The Culture and Social Institutions of Ancient Iran* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004).

60 McGuire, *A Marxist Archaeology*, 9–17; Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 33–34.

61 Paul Wetherly, *Marxism and the State: An Analytical Approach* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

'formations', slaveholding, and the Asiatic mode of production have been abandoned.[62] In general, though historical materialism and historical determinisms are now doubted, many of the ideas of Marx are still relevant today.[63]

Contemporary Revisions of Classic Marxist Concepts

After the decline of state-sponsored orthodox Marxism, the other ways in which Marx's ideas have been taken up and developed became more important in the field. We have mentioned the importance of the Australian archaeologist Childe. Marxian ideas on history were supplemented by Marxist-inspired historians and social scientists who were also able to draw upon such non-Marxist thinkers as Max Weber.[64] Marxist thought can still be turned into a useful tool by contemporary historians to deal with Ancient Near Eastern history. We will try to answer the question of what is still relevant from the Marxist studies on the Ancient Near East and what are the current approaches of Marxist studies relating to the Ancient Near East. There are some traditional Marxist topics which have continued to be relevant and other Marxist positions which have been modified. These include the traditional Marxist themes and positions, or those in need of modification, which are discussed hereafter: Historical stages of humanity; oriental despotism and the Asiatic mode of production; slaveholding societies.

Historical stages of human history: The ideas of social formation and the stages of history were among the principle Marxist ideas which were applied to the Ancient Near East by Marxist historians.[65] The traditional Marxist pattern of the phases of history, that is, the six stages of development or 'social formations': the pre-class formation (the primitive community), then three classes: slaveholding, feudalism and capitalism, socialism and communism is now, in general, no longer popular with historians.[66]

Historians have been forced to reconsider these stages and to develop new valid historical concepts and periodisation. Even Marxist scholars of the Ancient Near East represented by the great authority in the field, Diakonoff, considered the Marxist theory of historical materialism as old-fashioned. In the 1990s, the

62 Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 209–212.
63 Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 208–218.
64 Hobsbawm, Marxist Historiography Today, 180–187.
65 Diakonoff, *Early Antiquity*, 4–13.
66 See Diakonoff, *The Paths of History*, 2–4; Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 295–301.

Marxist theory of historical process proved that this theory as it had been represented by the Marxist historians of the twentieth century was totally out-dated. Marxist scholars declared in the 1990s that the theory of historical phases was in need of reconsideration due to the realities of the twentieth century They believed that the hypothesis of the awaiting Communist step is poorly proved and pointed to other weaknesses, both theoretic and pragmatic.[67]

Diakonoff developed new perspectives in his work *The Paths of History* (1999). According to him, the historical stages of history are not six stages as was maintained by traditional Marxist theory, but rather eight. These are as follows: First Phase (Primitive); Second Phase (Primitive Communal); Third Phase (Early Antiquity); Fourth Phase (Imperial Antiquity); Fifth Phase (the Middle Ages); Sixth Phase (the Stable Absolutist Post-Medieval Phase); Seventh Phase (Capitalist); Eighth Phase (Post-Capitalist).[68]

Marx and Engels explained in the *Communist Manifesto* that a continuous component throughout recorded history is that social change occurs as a result of the class struggle.[69] According to recent studies of Marxist historians such as Diakonoff, class struggle is no longer considered to be a prime-mover for social struggle and social culture changes.[70] It is now evident that in the Ancient Near East transitions between historical stages have often taken place in a peaceful and gradual manner and that they were settled through consensus.[71] As a result, class struggle – which was considered as the key social contradiction – is in many cases doubtful. In addition, despite the invasions and migration movements that are well-known in history, the processes of assimilation and acculturation of social groups allowed an autochthonous habitat to continue.[72] This means that class struggle and the issue of class antagonism as a historical event are now doubtful.[73] The challenge remains for historians to know and understand how social changes function and happen. On the other hand, some historians have accepted the notion of class struggle as a determining factor in the history of Ancient Greece.[74]

67 Diakonoff, *The Paths of History*, 3.
68 The whole book of Diakonoff, *The Paths of History* is a discussion of the eight stages.
69 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986), 34.
70 The notion class struggle disappeared from the last studies of Diakonoff, *Early Antiquity* and The *Paths of History.*
71 Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 287–294.
72 Diakkonoff, *The Paths of History*, 17.
73 Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, 449.
74 See Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World* (London: Cornell University Press, 1981).

Oriental despotism and the Asiatic mode of production: Both notions are now considered old-fashioned.[75] However, the concept of Oriental despotism which belongs more to the legacy of Eurocentrism is still in the minds of many in the West.[76] A traditional view of the Oriental despotism of oriental rulers has dominated European conceptions of the Orient, at least since the eighteenth century.[77]

Marx, Engels and Marxist scholars considered the 'Orient' and Africa, etc. as having experienced a different process of development than Classic Antiquity and Europe.[78] According to some writers, this signified that the whole world had passed through the same stages of progress except for the 'Orient'[79] (but this would probably also apply to other regions of the world, such as Africa or Latin America). Thus, the Orient was considered in this case as 'the Other' of Europe, which became an orthodoxy among those who studied the ancient world and excluded the Orient from the developments in Europe.[80]

The notion of the Asiatic mode of production was formulated for understanding Asiatic societies. It was developed primarily by Marxist historians and applied to the study of the Ancient Near East.[81] This model of the Asiatic mode of production has subsequently been an essential feature in Marxist theory and politics. There is no agreement about it among the Marxist historians themselves, but it has mostly been criticised by Western scholars.[82]

The Asiatic mode of production is based on the idea of a fundamental difference between the East and the West including the absence of the private property of land in the Orient, self-ruling village communities and a despotic centralised state in charge of public buildings, especially large-scale irrigation systems, that

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75 Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 165–268.
76 See for example Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries, "The spirit of despotism: Understanding the tyrant within," *Human Relations* 59, 2 (2006), 195–220.
77 Vicesimus Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism* (London: W. Hone, 1821), 12–18; Kets de Vries, The spirit of despotism, 195–220; Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso Books, 1974), 462–549.
78 Marx, Formen; Umberto Melotti, *Marx and the Third World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1977), Andrej Kreutz, "Marx and the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1983): 155–171.
79 On the Concept of Eurocentrism and the question of Marx's and Marxist historians Eurocentrism see Kolja Lindner, "Marx's Eurocentrism: Postcolonial Studies and Marx Scholarship," *Radical Philosophy* 161 (2010): 27–41.
80 Kreutz, *Marx and the Middle East*, 155–171.
81 Marian Sawer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 40–146; Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 462–549.
82 Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 462–549.

is responsible for the financing of public infrastructure and state institutions, mainly through power and the control of the armed forces.[83]

Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production was primarily formulated in terms of the absence of strong economic structures and processes. The Asiatic mode of production was also a version of the conventional political notion of 'Oriental despotism'. It has been applied by the Soviet historian Diakonoff to Mesopotamia.[84] This mode of production has been defined also as 'despotic-village community',[85] and is described as a despotic monarchic ruling class who lived in central cities and directly appropriated surplus from countryside communities belonging to them. This means that the Asiatic mode was also a type of the traditional political concept of 'Oriental despotism'.[86]

The Asiatic mode of production is a concept that has been the topic of much debate by both Marxist and non-Marxist historians and it has been energetically criticised for its absence of an empirical foundation and for drawing on the Orientalist idea of Asiatic stagnation.[87] It is still sometimes applied by classical historians who seek a way to exclude the Near East from their field of study.[88] The Marxist Orientalist Maxime Rodinson considered the concept of the Asiatic mode of production to be weak and too simplistic for the study of highly complex societies.[89] Furthermore, the field of postcolonial studies has rejected the Asiatic mode of production concept, following Edward Said's *Orientalism*, seeing it as a reflection of the cultural stereotypes that encouraged European colonial expansion.[90]

The hypotheses of Wittfogel on Oriental despotism were sharply criticised from the beginning, but his hydraulic hypothesis has recently been revisited

83 Melotti, *Marx and the Third World*, 73–76; Diakonoff, *Early Antiquity*, 5–6, 9–11.
84 Igor M. Diakonoff, "Early Despotisms in Mesopotamia," in *Early Antiquity*, trans. Alexander Kirjanov, Igor M. Diakonoff, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), 84–97; Kreutz, Marx and the Middle East, 159–162.
85 Diakonoff, *Early Antiquity*, 9.
86 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 32–33; Stephen P. Dunn, *The Fall and Rise of the Asiatic Mode of Production* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012).
87 Bryan S. Turner, *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 2014), 39–52.
88 Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 462–549; Dunn, *The Fall and Rise of the Asiatic Mode of Production*; Sawer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production*, 40–146; Lindner, "Marx's Eurocentrism," 27–41.
89 Maxime Rodinson, *Islam and capitalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1974), 58–68.
90 Said, *Orientalism*, 9, 153–166. This book criticises and fixes on the colonial aspects of Western intellectual and academic legacies and influenced scholars to pay attention to the miscalculated misinterpreting of the oriental culture in Marxist historiography and neo-Marxist economic theories of imperialism.

for understanding ancient societies.[91] However, there are some scholars who still use the Marxist economic approaches such as the concept of Modes of Production and apply them to Ancient Near Eastern studies, including Biblical studies.[92]

Some Marxist historians make the useful difference between the mode of production as a general concept and a social formation that concerns specific societies which may combine various modes of production.[93] In this case, mode of production expresses a specific phase of history epitomised by the main common form of production, for example, primitive communism, Asiatic mode of production, the ancient mode of production, feudalism, capitalism, socialism and communism.[94]

It has been suggested recently that theories on the Asiatic mode of production and its relations to other modes (such as the Slaveholding and Feudalism modes) belong to the field of Marxist studies rather than to the study of the Near East.[95] Liverani developed a new perspective in dealing with the socio-economic relations in the Ancient Near East, which makes use of the concept of 'modes of production'. He compares the domestic mode of production in the village societies to the palace mode of production in the cities. The latter derives its resources from the villages for non-productive reasons and intrudes upon the rights of the community through the commercialisation of the land. [96]

The existence of an 'Oriental' or 'Asiatic' mode of production seems to be an extremely misleading notion. It has no foundation and was based on a seriously faulty knowledge of the Oriental world and it is doubtful to be of any value in sociological or historical assessment.[97] As a result, the concept of Oriental des-

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91 Witzens, "Kritik der Thesen Karl A. Wittfogels"; Michael J. Harrower, "Is the hydraulic hypothesis dead yet? Irrigation and social change in ancient Yemen," *World Archaeology* 41, no. 1 (2009): 58–72.

92 See for instance the study of Gerald West, "Tracking an ancient Near Eastern economic system: The tributary mode of production and the temple-state," *Old Testament Essays* 24, no. 2 (2011): 511–532, in which he gave a model depending on Marxist economic analysis that he gathered and then used to study the economic system in the Ancient Near East comparing that with the Classical world and biblical history. On Economic system in the ancient Near East see Kajsa Ekholm and Jonathan Friedman, "Imperialism and Exploitation in Ancient World- Systems," *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center) 6, no. 1 (1982): 87–109.

93 Dunn, *The Fall and Rise of the Asiatic Mode of Production.*

94 Sawer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production*, 40–146.

95 Diakkonoff, *The Paths of History.*

96 Liverani, *The Ancient Near East.*

97 For current sources on the ancient Near East see for example Snell, *A Companion to the Ancient Near East*; Frahm, *A Companion to Assyria*; Leick, *The Babylonian World.*

potism, which was associated with the Asiatic mode of production, is regarded as doubtful according to Marxist historians.[98]

Slaveholding societies: The written records of the Ancient Near East give us information about the experience of slavery from the beginning of the third millennium until the end of the first millennium BCE. Although there was a high number of slaves in Mesopotamian society, there was no system of slaveholding in ancient Mesopotamia.[99] Since important data about slaves is to be gained from many cuneiform economic and legal documents and from the Mesopotamian law codes such as the Code of Hammurabi,[100] this topic received much attention from researchers, and its study is still influenced by Marxist thought.[101]

Until the 1990s, the dominant opinion in Marxist historiography was that the societies of the Ancient Near East represented the earliest phase of the slaveholding formation.[102] Slavery was one of the classical topics of Marxist thought and it was intensively studied.[103]

Struve developed the dogma that slavery was the foundation of Ancient Near Eastern economies.[104] In a paper on slaveholding relationships in ancient Mesopotamia, presented at the State Academy for the History of Material Culture in 1933, both Struve's position and his method experienced fundamental changes that were followed by later Marxist historians.[105]

In orthodox Marxist historiography, the Ancient Near East, Classical Greece and Rome are commonly understood to have been slave societies, characterised by a mode of production in which slave labour produces the greatest quantity of surplus value. Slavery need not, according to this concept, be the principal form of labour in respect of numbers of workers or the total amount of production. While peasant farmers may have been responsible for the greater portion of the value produced, slavery will have been the principal means by which the value produced by direct labour was taken by the class of large landowners,

98 See Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 209–212.
99 Daniel C. Snell, "Slavery in the ancient Near East," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Vol. 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, ed. Keith Bradley (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 4–21.
100 Dandamayev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, 6–29.
101 Snell, Slavery in the ancient Near East, 4–21; Laura Culbertson, ed., *Slaves and Households in the Near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2010).
102 Dandamayev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, 67–102; Diakonoff, *Early Antiquity*; Krikh, Assyriology and Stalinism, 191–209.
103 Snell, Slavery in the ancient Near East, 4–21; Dandamayev, *Slavery in Babylonia*, 30–35.
104 On the Marxist notion of slavery in general see Igor M. Diakonoff, "Slaves, Helots and Serfs in Early Antiquity," *Acta antiqua Academiae Scientarium Hungricae* 22 (1974): 45–78 and Dandamayev, *Slavery in Babylonia*.
105 Krikh, Assyriology and Stalinism, 191–209.

and thus the basis for the leisure and authority of the leading social class.[106] Important data on slavery is available in the cuneiform records.[107]

A considerable body of contributions to the study of the state formations in the Ancient Near East was written by several scholars, among them was the East German scholar Klengel.[108] These contributions are still important today as a part of some concepts of orthodox Marxism like Oriental despotism, etc.[109]

This concept of slaveholding is no longer accepted by specialists and it has been modified. The Marxist scholar M. Dandamayev in his work *Slavery in Babylonia* summarised the issue as follows:

> In Soviet literature on the Ancient Orient the opinion is widespread that the societies of the Ancient Near East constitute the earliest stages of slave society. However, though slaves in the proper sense of the word already existed in Mesopotamia in the third millennium BC, in the second millennium BC, had come to play a significant role in production, nonetheless, slavery never reached in Babylonia such a degree of development that one can speak of slave labor as having the leading role in the economy. Slave labor was only one of several types of forced labor and not always the most significant. That there was no predominance of slave labor in any branch of the Babylonian economy is not the main point; more important is that labor in agriculture was furnished primarily by free farmers and tenants and that free labor also dominated in craft industries.[110]

It is now obvious that the use of slave labour in production was not the driving force of the ancient social formation in the Ancient Near East. It appears that there was neither slaveholding formation in the Ancient Near East nor was there a feudal model in the Near East similar to the European one. [111] It is important to note that the model of the household that is found in the current scholarly works on Mesopotamia is based on a Marxist interpretation of the corpus of cuneiform texts.[112] In Syria-Palestine and Egypt, there is evidence for something resembling the Mesopotamian practice of slavery.[113]

106 On slavery in Greek in general see Norbert Brockmeyer, *Antike Sklaverei* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1987), 23–29.

107 Snell, Slavery in the ancient Near East, 4–21.

108 Klengel, "Einige Erwägungen zur Staats-Entstehung in Mesopotamien," 36–55.

109 Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 165–268.

110 Dandamayev, Slavery in Babylonia, 660.

111 Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 204.

112 See for instance Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 30–74.

113 Abd el-Muhsen Bakir, *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt* (Le Caire: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1952).

Contemporary Marxist Perspectives

Apart from the Marxist notions that have been discarded, Marxist approaches have contributed six major elements that are still relevant for the study of the ancient history of the Near East.[114] These include the socio-economic approach, the debate on the origin of the state, studying history from below, a holistic approach to history, evolution and lager-scale economic change as well as Marxist and colonial historiography.

Socio-economic approach: One of the most dominant perspectives for studying Ancient Near Eastern history is the study of the economy and society of the Ancient Near East based on Marxist concepts, analytical tools, and models and methods by scholars who do not themselves identify as Marxists.[115] Among these current topics are social structure, economic structure, and the market, land property, state theories, city communities, etc.[116] Emphasis on the importance of economic and social factors in history was a characteristic not only of Marxist scholars but also the Marxians.[117]

The socio-economic approach to the study the ancient world was already established by Michael Rostovtzeff (1870 – 1952), who never identified himself as a Marxist but nonetheless applied Marxist ideas to ancient history.[118] Scholars used their own understandings of Marxism and were inspired by the materialist notion of history.[119] They concentrated on the statement of Marx in which he asserted that thoughts do not fall from the sky, but reflect more or less accurately objective circumstances, social forces and contradictions beyond the command of men and women and that they exist on the base of the social relations of production or the relationships between social classes.[120] There arose complex legal and political models with diverse cultural, ideological and religious reflections. The materialist notion of history is able to trace this twisting road.[121] There are

114 On relevant aspects of Marxist thoughts for ancient history, see the important study achieved by Vlassopoulos, "Marxism and Ancient History," 643 – 669.
115 See Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 202 – 205; Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*.
116 Burchard Brentjes, ed., *Das Grundeigentum in Mesopotamien. Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte / Sonderband* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1987); Liverani, *The Ancient Near East*.
117 Hobsbawm, *Marxist Historiography Today*, 182.
118 Michael I. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941); Heinz Heinen, "Michael Ivanovich Rostovtzeff (1870 – 1952)," in *Klassiker der Geschichtswissenschaft*, vol. 1, ed. Lutz Raphael (Munich; Beck, 2006), 172 – 189.
119 Hobsbawm, *Marxist Historiography Today*, 180 – 187.
120 Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 210 – 212.
121 Klengel, *Kulturgeschichte des alten Vorderasiens*.

currently many fields in which scholars are using Marxist tools. One such example is the study of the Mesopotamian economy.[122] One of the most solid current works on the social and economic history of the Ancient Near East has been produced by the Italian Marxist historian Liverani.[123] Some archaeologists and historians have combined Marxism and structuralism in their studies, while others place the starting point of the debate in the concrete experiences of human existence, with emphasis on the production of the requirements of life.[124]

The origin of the state: One of the most important subjects for Marxist historians is the question of the origin of the state.[125] The question of the beginning of the institution of the state was a central debate which depended on the Marxist studies about the family and the origins of the state that followed Engels, in particular studies produced by East German scholars.[126] Important aspects of this debate are still valid today. In association with the Marxist concept of the Asiatic mode of production, the concept of the state was described in the fashion of the so-called Oriental despotism.[127] Since there are no established and accepted solutions for this matter, the formation and evolution of the early or archaic state continues to remain a big issue of discussion today.[128] Evolutionism is currently an important perspective for some of the former Marxist and Marxist-inspired scholars.[129] In studying the state, the classical Soviet Marxist historians' approach in Russia changed to one of evolution.[130] Marx's theory is an attempt to accept both types of accounts of the Orient and to explain the apparent unity of states often made up of previously independent units which nevertheless cooperated in great communal works such as road building and large-scale irrigation such as in Egypt and Mesopotamia.[131]

122 Michael Jursa, ed., *Aspects of the economic history of Babylonia in the first Millennium BC* (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2010).

123 Liverani, *The Ancient Near East.*

124 Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, postmodernism and globalism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 43.

125 Neumann, "Altorientalistik in der DDR," 202.

126 Klengel, "Einige Erwägungen zur Staats-Entstehung in Mesopotamien," 36–55; Herrmann and Köhn, *Familie, Staat und Gesellschaftsformation.*

127 Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 462–549.

128 Leonid E. Grinin, Robert L. Carneiro, R. L., Dmitri M. Bondarenko, D.M., Nikolay N. Kradin and Andrey V. Korotayev, eds., *The Early State, Its Alter-natives and Analogues* (Saratov: Uchitel Publishing House, 2004); Yoffee, *Myths of the archaic state.*

129 Gill Stein and Mitchell S. Rothman, *Chiefdoms and Early States in the Near East: The Organizational Dynamics of Complexity* (Madison: Prehistory Press, 1994), 1–10.

130 Yoffee, *Myths of the archaic State*; Grinin et al., *The Early State.*

131 Igor M. Diakonoff, "The Rise of the Despotic State in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Ancient Mesopotamia, Socio-economic History: a Collection of Studies by Soviet Scholars*, ed. Igor M. Dia-

History from below: History from above was for a long time the dominant form of writing history.[132] As an alternative to this, history from below could be described as a response against the conventional historians who are almost exclusively concerned with the society and politics of the ruling classes and religious elites. History from below has been also designated as 'history of everyday life', the 'people's history' and 'history of the common people', etc. The idea of studying history from the bottom or below emerged from Marxist traditions. Although the Marxist historians have heavily influenced the writing of history from below in the twentieth century, there are also others whose writings can be said to have contributed to this trend.

History from below is one of the most significant Marxist ideas which were applied to the study of the ancient history of the Near East and played a key role in extending the concepts of the writing of its history. History from below focuses on *Alltagsgeschichte*, ('history of everyday life') the subaltern social groups such as slaves, peasants, women, minority groups, ethnic groups, nomadic groups and other subaltern groups as well as on prosopography of individuals and groups in addition to oral history. History from below made an attempt to produce wide-ranging history-writing in order to explore the realities of marginalised social units and individuals, to discover original sources and to reconsider the well-known ones. It is a historical viewpoint that rejects the narrative of traditional history. Though the influence of the perspective of history from below has been significant, it has not been able to displace traditional history.[133]

There is no doubt that the notion of history from below represents a challenge for both Marxist historians and other scholars of ancient history in studying how to investigate the subaltern social groups as active performers in history and how to integrate them into historical narrative.[134] Marxist historians have made contributions to the historiography from below as well as to cultural historiography and historiography of the family, slavery, rural communities, noma-

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konoff (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), 173 – 203; Klengel, "Einige Erwägungen zur Staats-Entstehung in Mesopotamien," 36 – 55.

132 Van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*, 85 – 104.

133 Andrew I. Port, "History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Vol.11, ed. James D. Wright, ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 108 – 113.

134 Jim Sharpe, "History from below," in *New perspectives on historical writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 24 – 41.

dic groups, etc. In particular, Marxist historiography has made contributions to the methodology of writing history from below in ancient Mesopotamia.[135]

Marxist historiography from below deals chiefly with the economic development of politically active masses. The role of the individual in history is here an important object of research.[136] The connection of Subaltern Studies with the concept of 'history from below' was popularised by British Marxist historians.[137]

Archaeology from below has also been applied as a method in studying the historical past.[138] This approach is the opposite of the mainstream trend of 'archaeology from above'. One of the most important aspects of archaeology from below is the consideration of the heritage of a social group as an active process of life in the historical past of this group of people. In this case, heritage is regarded as an impressive survival which is developed and altered in the hands of the society to whom it belongs.[139]

Marxist-inspired archaeologists and historians concentrated not just on palaces, castles and fortresses, but also on rural settlements and villages. It actually enriched our knowledge of the past societies by giving attention not only to the high-level issues and developments in society and culture but also to evidence of daily life and the role of the subaltern in society.[140]

Thus, history should be not merely be a representation of rulers' biographies. It should be regarded from below, from the perspective of the men and women who actually did the work in any assumed society, not from that of governors, officials, landowners or other superiors, who have never been more than a small element of human history.

The holistic approach to history: This perspective can be described as an interdisciplinary study covering all domains in the social sciences and humanities and combines it with research achieved by the so-called natural sciences utilising numerous analytical methods and techniques of historic investigation

135 Jonathan S. Tenney, *Life at the Bottom of Babylonian Society: Servile Laborers at Nippur in the 14th and 13th Centuries B.C.* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); A. Dornauer, *Assyrische Nutzlandschaft in Obermesopotamien. Natürliche und anthropogene Wirkfaktoren und ihre Auswirkungen* (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2016).

136 Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 53.

137 Port, History from Below, 108–113.

138 Neil Faulkner, "Archaeology from Below," *Public Archaeology* 1 (2000): 21–33.

139 Benjamin W. Porter, "Near Eastern Archaeology: Imperial Pasts, Postcolonial Presents, and the Possibilities of a Decolonized Future," in *Handbook of Postcolonial Archaeology*, eds. Jane Lydon and Uzma Z. Rizv (London: Routledge, 2010), 51–60.

140 Matt Perry, "History from Below," in *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, 2 vols., ed. Kelly Boyd, (Chicago, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999), 543–544.

in these fields. It is an approach that views the world holistically.[141] Marxist historiography insists on such a holistic attitude to analyse human behaviour and to study the history of segments of societies in relation to the whole and individual social groups in terms of wide-ranging networks of relations within the society. Marxist thought emphasised the systemic interdependence of all aspects of social life as a means of assuring the survival of human groups.[142]

The holistic perspective to studying the history of the Ancient Near East as a whole unity is of great importance and gives the possibility for a profound understanding of Ancient Near Eastern culture. Several studies have been written on this topic.[143] In the important study entitled *Early Antiquity*, Russian scholars sought to provide a major universal history of the Near East in ancient times.[144] The holistic approach as a method in studying Mesopotamian history has been employed in some studies which depend on the textual sources.[145] This holistic approach is able to link together economy, society, political institutions and culture and revolution, and to link these with the concept of large-scale historical change, which provides a more comprehensive understanding of the past.[146] The Marxist notions such as the mode of production, infrastructure (base) and superstructure, class, productive forces, productive relations and revolution give the possibility to combine together various processes and are able to reveal long-term changes.[147]

Evolution and large-scale historical changes: An important concept of Marxist historiography, which has been applied to the history of the Ancient Near East, is that of large-scale historical changes such as the Neolithic Revolution in the Marxist tradition that caused sedentarisation followed by urbanisation. Further, large-scale historical change comprises long periods of changes of the historical phases, which caused the development of the different types

141 Vlassopoulos, "Marxism and Ancient History," 216–220.

142 Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 179–181.

143 See the study of Richard L. Zettler, "Reconstructing the World of Ancient Mesopotamia: Divided Beginnings and Holistic History," in *Excavating Asian History: Interdisciplinary Studies in Archaeology and History*, eds. Norman Yoffee, Bradley L. Crowell (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 113–159.

144 See the important holistic study of John N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of history* (London: Routledge, 1992) and see also Zettler, *Reconstructing the World of Mesopotamia*, 113–159.

145 Karen Radner and Eleanor Robson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).

146 Vlassopoulos, "Marxism and Ancient History," 216–220.

147 Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 643–646.

of ancient and archaic as well as modern states.[148] The evolutionary pattern has its Marxist genesis in Engels' *Origin of the Family*. One chief argument of the evolutionary-Marxist notion of history is that any assumed period is genetically and dialectically associated with its predecessors, that is to say, there is a permanent feature to change.

One of the important Marxist approaches, which is still fruitful today, is the evolutionary one: Its purpose is to seek out and identify the development of change in human history through wide-ranging broad standards.[149] The Marxist version of evolutionism has been accepted and given the designation neo-evolutionary perspective.[150] The application of Marxist concepts of social evolution, which involve the comprehensive study of social and political organisation, subsistence systems, trade and settlement patterns, etc. is an important method in dealing with the Ancient Near East.[151] This was a major contribution of Marxist theory to Ancient Near Eastern history and archaeology: an assertion of a degree of cultural continuity through Prehistory up to the emergence of class society in the Bronze Age.[152]

Marxist and colonial historiography: One of the most relevant aspects of Marxist thought is the anti-colonialist attitude. On the notion of colonialism, attention should be given here to two points: how the Marxist historians or Marxist-inspired historians apply the term colonialism in studying the history of the Ancient Near East and secondly the perspectives of colonial history and historiography on the Ancient Near East.[153]

The term colonialism has been applied in studying Mesopotamian history. A good example of this can be seen in the studies of the neo-Marxist, Cuban anthropologist Guillermo Algaze. He studied the progress and spread of civilisation from the Euphrates region to other areas of ancient Mesopotamia. He maintained that colonial expansion initiated in south Iraq radiated northwards and was responsible for the establishment of city-states in northern Iraq and Syria and

148 Daniel Little, "Explaining large-scale historical change," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 30, no. 1 (2000): 89–112.
149 Childe, *Social Evolution*.
150 Stephen Shennan, "After social evolution: a new archaeological agenda?" in *Archaeological theory: who sets the agenda?*, ed. Norman Yoffee and Andrew Sherratt (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 53–59.
151 Topolski, *Methodology of History*, 176–181.
152 Childe, *Social Evolution*.
153 Jane Lydon and Uzma Z. Rizv, *Handbook of Postcolonial Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2010).

south-eastern Asia Minor.[154] Algaze made an analysis of what he called colonialism and imperialism in ancient civilisations, especially the city of Uruk's expansion in ancient Mesopotamia. Uruk seems to have created the world's earliest identified colonial system. It was a well-organised network in order to achieve access to natural resources in Syria, Asia Minor and the Zagros Mountains.[155] Another example of such studies is on the expansion and colonisation of the western Mediterranean by the Phoenicians.[156]

One important aspect of the colonial historiographical approaches to studying the Ancient Near East is that many European scholars considered these countries as their property.[157] It is of significance to study how Western colonial historians have presented these countries in their studies. Recently this topic has been studied by several scholars in the West, among them Marxist historians.[158] Archaeologists, travellers and diplomats not only made journeys in the Middle East, but they also excavated and plundered the treasuries of Egypt and Mesopotamia, etc.[159] Western colonial historians and archaeologists were always heavily influenced by Biblical and colonial ideology and it is important to the study of their historical narratives and how they have presented the indigenous peoples of these countries and their history.[160] It is of interest that postcolonial

154 Guillermo Algaze, *Ancient Mesopotamia at the Dawn of Civilization: The Evolution of an Urban Landscape* (Chicago: UCP, 2008), 28 – 39.

155 Guillermo Algaze, *The Uruk World System: The Dynamics of Expansion of Early Mesopotamian Civilization* (Chicago: UCP, 1993), 8 – 18.

156 Maria E. Aubet, *Commerce and Colonization in the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013).

157 Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck, eds., *Archaeologies of the Middle East Critical Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

158 Mario Liverani, "Imperialism," in *Archaeologies of the Middle East Critical Perspectives*, eds. Susan Pollock and Reinhard Bernbeck (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 1999, 223 – 243; see also Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

159 On the plundering of ancient oriental artefacts that filled Western museum such the Louvre, British Museum and Pergamum Museum, Berlin as well as the political role of archaeologist see Charlotte Trümpler, ed., *Das grosse Spiel: Archäologie und Politik zur Zeit des Kolonialismus (1860 – 1940): Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung, Ruhr Museum Essen, 11. Februar – 13. Juni 2010* (Köln: DuMont, 2010); On the approach of Western Archaeologist see the critical study of the Marxist archaeologist Alexander Mongait, *Archäologie und Gegenwart* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1985).

160 Trigger, "Alternative Archaeologies," 355 – 370; Nadia Abu el-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: UCP, 2002). See also the critical study of the so-called Biblical Archaeology and its colonial goals by Neil A. Silberman, "Promised lands and chosen peoples: the politics and poetics of archaeological narrative," in *Nationalism, politics, and the practice of archaeology*, eds. Philip L. Kohl and Clare Fawcett (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 249 – 262.

theory relating to history and archaeology has been inspired by Marxism and the postcolonial scholars are indebted to the theoretical works of Marxist scholarship and the Marxist historical framework.[161] This is sometimes awkwardly interpreted or disavowed.

Conclusion

An overview of the Marxist studies on the Ancient Near East shows that Marxist historians made significant contributions, in particular to the socio-economic structure of the societies of the ancient Near East, to the origins of the state, slavery, etc. Marxist historians and Marx-inspired historians working on the Ancient Near East built an important school after World War II, which continued to the end of the 1980s and presented a challenge for the Western school in studying the Ancient Near East.

This study shows that after the 1990s the Marxist studies have been modified and some of the Marxist historical concepts have been discarded such as class struggle, the six historical stages of human history (instead, eight stages have suggested by Diakonoff) and the idea of a dominant slaveholding formation in the Ancient Near East. Oriental despotism and the Asiatic mode of production are now very doubtful. However, these notions continue to be relevant, but in modified forms.

Furthermore, this paper presented some Marxist perspectives which are still relevant in studying history in general, and those that have been applied in studying the history of the Ancient Near East and are still significant. Among these notions are the socio-economic approaches, theories of the origin of the state, studying history from below, the holistic perspective in studying history, the concept of large-scale historical change and the use of Marxist historiography to analyse colonial historical writings. There are many valid critiques on both Marx's works and the body of Marxist historiography which developed after Marx. However, many of Marx's thoughts are still very useful and might be used to build a framework for the study of the Ancient Near East.

161 Patterson, *Marx's Ghost*, 30 – 32.